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Marion Ross

Marion Ross (born **Marian Ellen Ross**; October 25, 1928) is a retired American actress. Her best-known role is that of Marion Cunningham on the ABC television sitcom *Happy Days*, on which she starred from 1974 to 1984 and for which she received two Primetime Emmy Award nominations. Before her success on *Happy Days*, Ross appeared in a variety of film roles, appearing in *The Glenn Miller Story* (1954), *Sabrina* (1954), *Lust for Life* (1956), *Teacher's Pet* (1958), *Some Came Running* (1958), *Operation Petticoat* (1959), and *Honky* (1971), as well as several minor television roles, one of which was on television's *The Lone Ranger* (1954). She was also twice nominated successively in 1992 and 1993 for the Primetime Emmy Award for her performance on the CBS television comedy-drama *Brooklyn Bridge* and later netted another Emmy nomination (her fifth and last) in 1999 for a two-episode appearance on the popular CBS drama *Touched by an Angel*. Ross also starred in the high-profile, long-anticipated sequel to *Terms of Endearment* (1983), *The Evening Star* (1996), in a turn for which she was nominated for the Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress, as well as both a nomination and win for a Lone Star Film and Television Award for Best Supporting Actress.

Since the 1990s, Ross has been known for voice-over work on animated television series, including *King of the Hill* and *SpongeBob SquarePants*, among others, and recurring roles on *The Drew Carey Show*, *Gilmore Girls*, and *Brothers & Sisters* and guest appearances.

Marion Ross

Ross in 1961

Born	Marian Ellen Ross[1] October 25, 1928 Watertown, Minnesota, U.S.
Education	Point Loma High School
Alma mater	San Diego State University
Occupation	Actress
Years active	1953–2021
Known for	Happy Days · The Evening Star · The Glenn Miller Story
Spouses	Freeman Meskimen (m. 1951; div. 1969) Paul Michael (m. 1988; died 2011)
Children	2, including Jim Meskimen

Early life

Ross was born on October 25, 1928, in Watertown, Carver County, Minnesota, as the daughter of Gordon and Ellen (née Hamilton) Ross, natives of Saskatchewan, Canada.[2][3] She lived in Waconia, then moved to Willmar, and eventually to Albert Lea, Minnesota.[4]

At the age of 13, she changed the spelling of her name from "Marian" to "Marion" because she thought it would look better on a marquee. After completing her sophomore year in high school, she moved to Minneapolis, studying drama at the MacPhail Center for Music and attending Southwest High School. A year later, her family moved to San Diego, California.[5] She graduated from Point Loma High School in San Diego.[6]

Ross received her undergraduate degree from San Diego State University.[7]

Career

Early film and television roles: 1953–1973

Ross made her 1953 film debut in *Forever Female*, starring Ginger Rogers and William Holden. She found steady work in film, appearing in *The Glenn Miller Story* (1954), *Sabrina* (1954), *Lust for Life* (1956), *Lizzie* (1957), *Teacher's Pet* (1958), *Some Came Running* (1958), and *Operation Petticoat* (1959). She also appeared in *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), *Honky* (1971), and *Grand Theft Auto* (1977).

Ross' career on television also began in 1953, when she played the Irish maid on the series *Life with Father* for two years. In 1954, she appeared as Ginny Thorpe on *The Lone Ranger*, and in 1958, she appeared on NBC's *Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer* as Mary Williams. In 1959, she appeared as a teacher Miss McGinnis on ABC's *The Donna Reed Show*.

Ross also appeared on *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*, *The Millionaire* (1956 episode), *Steve Canyon*, *Perry Mason (The Case of the Romantic Rogue)*, *Buckskin*, *The Barbara Stanwyck Show*, *Father Knows Best*, *The Outer Limits* (The Special One), *Thriller (U.S. TV series)* (The Prisoner in the Mirror), *The Brothers Brannagan* (two episodes as Diane Warren), *The Eleventh Hour*, *Mannix*, *Route 66*, *Mr. Novak*, *Death Valley Days*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *The Brady Bunch*, *The Fugitive*, and *Night Court*.

In the 1961–62 television season, she played Gertrude Berg's daughter on the CBS sitcom *Mrs. G. Goes to College* as well as starred as a mail order bride on *Rawhide*. Ross had an uncredited and non-speaking role as one of the hapless passengers on board Trans Global Flight #2 in *Airport* (1970). That year, Ross played a computer scientist opposite Eric Braeden in the sci-fi thriller *Colossus: The Forbin Project*.

Happy Days success and roles thereafter: 1974–1995

Ross' best known role is on the sitcom *Happy Days*, which aired for 11 seasons on ABC, from 1974 to 1984. She portrayed matriarch Marion Cunningham, mother of Richie, Joanie, and (briefly) Chuck. She received Primetime Emmy Award nominations for her work on the show in 1979 and 1984. Ross later reprised Marion Cunningham on the spin-off series *Joanie Loves Chachi* and on *Family Guy*.

Happy Days press photo, 1974

Between 1978 and 1986, she appeared as different characters on *The Love Boat*. In the final (#9) 1986–87 television season, Ross became a series regular, playing Emily Haywood, who was the love interest of Captain Stubing, played by Gavin MacLeod. She later starred in the short-lived, critically acclaimed comedy-drama *Brooklyn Bridge*, which ran on CBS from 1991 to 1993. The series won a Golden Globe Award and was nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award following its first season. Ross also appeared on the game show *Password Plus* in 1979.

Recent roles: 1996–2021

In 1996, Ross starred as housekeeper Rosie Dunlop (played originally by Betty R. King in the preceding 1983 film), opposite Shirley MacLaine in *The Evening Star*, a sequel to *Terms of Endearment*. Despite panning the film, New York Times critic Janet Maslin enthused that, "Marion Ross does a warm, sturdy job as the devoted housekeeper who has been kept too long under Aurora's wing."[8] She went on to be nominated for a 1997 Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress for her performance, as well as going on to win the 1997 Lone Star Film and Television Award for Best Supporting Actress for that very same turn.

Ross at the 1992 Emmy Awards

Ross had a recurring role on *Touched by an Angel* as a homeless woman and was in the final two episodes of the series. Additionally, she played a secretly ill mother in "The Cat", an episode of *Early Edition* that first aired in April 1997. She had recurring roles as Drew Carey's mother on *The Drew Carey Show* (during one episode of which she was referred to as her *Happy Days* character Mrs. Cunningham, a deliberate error for a contest the show was running); as mean grandmother Bernice Forman on *That '70s Show*; and as Lorelai "Trix" Gilmore and Marilyn Gilmore on *Gilmore Girls*. She also frequently appeared on *Hollywood Squares*.

During the 1990s, Ross became active in voice-over work. She played Grandma SquarePants on Nickelodeon's *SpongeBob SquarePants*, and Mrs. Lopart on *Handy Manny*. She also guest-starred on *The Sylvester & Tweety Mysteries*, *The Wild Thornberrys*, *Generator Rex*, and *King of the Hill*.

In 2007, Ross appeared in *Music Within*. In 2007 and 2010, she played Ida Holden on ABC's *Brothers & Sisters*. In June 2008, the Albert Lea Civic Theater in Albert Lea, Minnesota, changed its name to the Marion Ross Performing Arts Center.[9] That year, Ross played Aunt Lucille in the film *Superhero Movie*,[10] and in 2009 she appeared in a guest spot on *The New Adventures of Old Christine*.

In 2010, Ross guest-starred on *Nurse Jackie* and *Grey's Anatomy*,[11] and appeared in the Cartoon Network television film *Scooby-Doo! Curse of the Lake Monster* as Mrs. Trowburg. In 2013, she guest-starred on both *Major Crimes* and *The Middle*, and in 2014 on *Two and a Half Men*. In September 2015, she began making brief appearances on MeTV to share her memories of her *Happy Days* co-stars. In 2020, Ross played Mrs. Genzinger in the Hallmark Christmas movie *Signed Sealed Delivered For Christmas*.

In 2021, Ross announced that she had officially retired from acting. She has, however, continued to make several small appearances in various online projects.

Personal life

Ross lives in Cardiff by the Sea, a neighborhood of the city of Encinitas, California, in northern San Diego County. In July 2011, she served as grand marshal of the Cardiff Centennial Celebrations. Ross lived in Los Angeles, with her husband, actor Paul Michael, before his death.

Ross's two children also work in entertainment. Son Jim Meskimen's credits include *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and appearances on *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* Marion and Jim have both acted in *The Boondocks* (although not always in the same episodes). Daughter Ellen Plummer was a writer/producer on *Friends*.

The Marion Ross Performing Arts Center in Albert Lea, Minnesota

Happy Days lawsuit

On April 19, 2011, Ross and four of her *Happy Days* co-stars, Erin Moran, Don Most, Anson Williams, and the estate of Tom Bosley filed a $10 million breach-of-contract lawsuit against CBS, which owns the show, claiming they had not been paid for merchandising revenue owed under their contracts. The cast members claimed they had not received revenue from show-related items, including comic books, T-shirts, scrapbooks, trading cards, games, lunch boxes, dolls, toy cars, magnets, greeting cards, and DVDs where their images appear on the box covers. Under their contracts, they were supposed to be paid five percent from the net proceeds of merchandising if their sole images were used, and half that amount if they were in a group. CBS said it owed the actors $8,500 and $9,000 each, most of it from slot machine revenue, but the group said they were owed millions. The lawsuit was initiated after Ross was informed, by a friend playing slots at a casino, of a *Happy Days*-themed machine on which players win the jackpot when five Marion Rosses are rolled.[12]

In October 2011, a judge rejected the group's fraud claim, which rejects their claim to millions of dollars in potential damages.[13] On June 5, 2012, a judge denied a motion filed by CBS to have the case thrown out, which meant it would go to trial on July 17 if the matter was not settled by then.[14] In July 2012, the actors settled their lawsuit with CBS. Each received a payment of $65,000 and a promise by CBS to continue honoring the terms of their contracts.[15][16]

Filmography

Film

Year	Title	Role	Notes
1953	*Forever Female*	Patty	
1954	*The Glenn Miller Story*	Polly Haynes	Uncredited
1954	*Secret of the Incas*	Miss Morris	Uncredited
1954	*Pushover*	Mrs. Crockett	Uncredited
1954	*Sabrina*	Spiller's Girlfriend	Uncredited
1956	*The Proud and Profane*	Joan	
1956	*Lust for Life*	Sister Clothilde	Uncredited
1956	*The Best Things in Life Are Free*	Nita Naldi-type	Uncredited
1956	*Around the World in 80 Days*		Uncredited
1957	*Lizzie*	Ruth Seaton	
1957	*God Is My Partner*	Frances Denning	
1958	*Teacher's Pet*	Katy Fuller	
1958	*Operation Zero Launch*	Rita Bradshaw	
1958	*Some Came Running*	Sister Mary Joseph	Uncredited
1959	*The Big Circus*		Uncredited
1959	*It Started with a Kiss*	Diane	Uncredited
1959	*Operation Petticoat*	Lt. Colfax RN	
1961	*Blueprint for Robbery*	Young Woman	
1970	*Airport*	Joan Myers - Passenger	Uncredited
1970	*Colossus: The Forbin Project*	Angela Fields	
1971	*Honky*	Mrs. Divine	
1977	*Grand Theft Auto*	Vivian Hedgeworth	
1981	*Midnight Offerings*	Emily Moore	Television film
1996	*The Evening Star*	Rosie Dunlop	
1998	*The Lake*	Maggie	

1999	*The Last Best Sunday*	Mrs. Larksmont	
2003	*Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star*	Marion Ross	
2006	*Where There's a Will*	Leslie Clyde Onstott	
2007	*Music Within*	Grandma	
2007	*Smiley Face*	Shirley	
2008	*Superhero Movie*	Aunt Lucille	
2010	*Scooby-Doo! Curse of the Lake Monster*	Hilda Trowburg	
2012	*Dear Dracula*	Grandma	Voice[17]
2014	*A Reason*	Aunt Irene Hilgrim	
2014	*A Perfect Christmas List*	Evie	
2018	*Angels on Tap*	Waitress	
2021	*Senior Entourage*	Marion	Final film before retirement

Television

Year	Title	Role	Notes
1958	*Perry Mason*	Helen Harvey	Episode: "The Case of the Romantic Rogue"
1959	*The Untouchables*	Vera Schultz	Episode: "The Dutch Schultz Story"
1962	*Rawhide*	Priscilla Brewer	
1963	*Route 66*	Nora Belden	Episode: "The Stone Guest"
1964	*The Outer Limits*	Agnes Benjamin	Episode: "The Special One"
1969	*The Brady Bunch*	Dr. Porter	Episode: "Is There A Doctor In The House"
1971	*Mission: Impossible*	Mrs. Foster	Episode: "A Ghost Story"
1974–1984	*Happy Days*	Marion Cunningham ("Mrs. C")	
1989	*Night Court*	Mrs. Daley	Episode: "The Trouble Is Not in Your Set"
1990	*MacGyver*	Sister Robin	Episode: "Harry's Will"
1991–1993	*Brooklyn Bridge*	Sophie Berger	
1995–2004	*The Drew Carey Show*	Beulah Carey	
1997	*The Sylvester & Tweety Mysteries*	Flavia	Voice, episode: "Yelp/Jeepers Creepers"[17]

1997	*Superman: The Animated Series*	General Richter	Voice, episode: "Speed Demons"[17]
1998–1999	*That '70s Show*	Bernice Forman	
2001–2005	*Gilmore Girls*	Lorelai "Trix" Gilmore, Marilyn Gilmore	
2001–2011	*SpongeBob SquarePants*	Grandma SquarePants	Voice, 4 episodes[17]
2004	*King of the Hill*	Ms. Wakefield	Voice, episode: "Ms. Wakefield"
2005	*Family Guy*	Marion Cunningham	Voice, episode: "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Fonz"
2006–2011	*Handy Manny*	Mrs. Lopart	Voice, 10 episodes[17]
2010	*Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated*	Grandma Moonbeam	Voice, episode: "When the Cicada Calls"
2011	*Generator Rex*	Determined Grandmother, Carmen, Grandma	Voice, 2 episodes[17]
2017–2020	*Please Tell Me I'm Adopted*	Mrs. Grant	3 episodes
2018	*Guardians of the Galaxy*	Doctor Minerva	Voice, episode: "Gotta Get Outta This Place"[17]

Video games

Year	Title	Role	Notes
2002	*SpongeBob SquarePants: Employee of the Month*	Grandma SquarePants	[17]
2008	*Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*	Nana	[17]

Book

- Ross, Marion (with David Laurell) (March 27, 2018). *My Days: Happy and Otherwise*. Kensington Books. ISBN 978-1-496-71515-9.

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External links

- Marion Ross (https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005385/) at IMDb
- Marion Ross (https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/89982) at the Internet Broadway Database

- Marion Ross (https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/marion-ross) at The Interviews: An Oral History of Television

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